

MR. PUNCH'S FANCY BALL.

DRAWING BY JOHN LEECH

[Mark Lemon is leading the orchestra, and Thackeray plays the flute. Shirley Brooks is first violin, and Leech holds the double-bass. Douglas Jerrold plays the cornet.]



# LONDON "PUNCH" AND ITS MAKERS

## I—THE WRITERS

IN July, 1841, at the Shakespeare Head, Wych Street, London, there sprung full grown into this vale of tears a certain hunch-backed, albeit shrewd and kindly dwarf, whose face, limned a little later by the inspired pencil of Richard Doyle, has since become familiar all around the world, and whose quips, and cranks and merry turns have played no small part in the history of the closing half of this history-making century.

London *Punch*—the dwarf I refer to—was born under unusual conditions. One Mark Lemon, a writer of considerable ability, was then the landlord of the Shakespeare Head. A tavern, boasting such a keeper and such a name, was, of course, frequented by a circle of wits, with whom in the year just mentioned *Punch* originated. There are conflicting claims as to the paternity of the infant, with the evidence in favor of Lemon and Douglas Jerrold, but history has it that its name was suggested by the place of its birth. If so, it at once lost all associations with the ladle and the bowl, and received a wider and better interpretation, and there is no neater piece of allegorical writing in our language than the introductory article of the first number, wherein is adroitly shadowed forth the moral of the work, *Punch*, suggestive of the "graver puppetry, the visual and oral cheats by which mankind are cajoled."

Indeed, since he took up his abode in historic Fleet Street where Dr. Samuel Johnson made the sorry Latin jest on the traitors' heads, and where his ghost is still supposed to walk o' nights, the hero of the famous puppet show, chosen for the presiding genius of the new

venture on the journalistic sea, has found or made his fun in other and very different ways than were his in the ancient and mythical time when he cultivated the wild oat on the sunny slope of the Apennines, and thought it fun to beat his wife, the luckless Judy, to toss the baby out of the window, to wallop the family doctor, and craftily to make way with the common hangman, all to the squeaking of cracked pipes. Four generations of prime

ministers and lesser ministers, of ex-ministers and would-be ministers, of fops and flunkies, of frauds and fribbles, have stood in awe of his wit. He kept alive the distrust that dogged the later days of Peel, and he long made Disraeli impossible and to the last absurd and theatrical. On the other hand, he aided not a little in the making of Palmerston, and how has he not laughed and made others laugh at Gladstone, without hurting him a bit; at his vast collars and his vaster energy; at Gladstone, who laughs at nothing, whereas his great rival laughed at everything. Little bonnets and big hoops, Lord Mayors and stock-



MARK LEMON.  
(From a private photograph.)

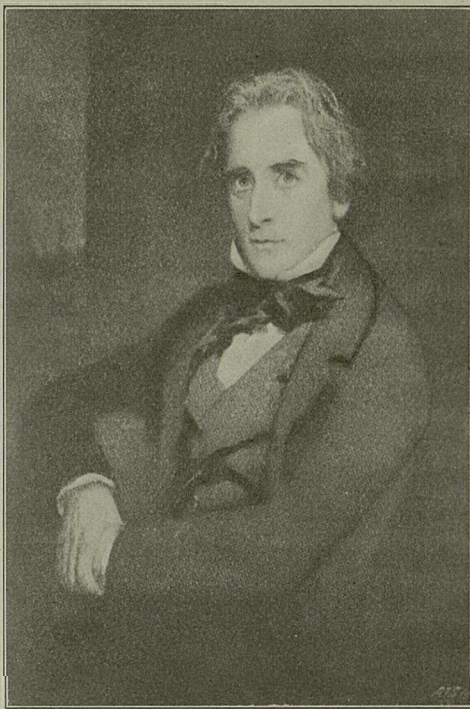


jobbers, Sir Gorgius Midas and Jeames Yellowplush, the Prince Consort and the stock that choked Private Thomas Atkins, Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns and the ruffian of Whitechapel—all these and a hundred more have winced under the wholesome cracking of that ready lash. And through it all, like the true humorist he is, he has ever been the friend of goodness and the enemy of evil, never stooping to bully the weak or to cringe to the powerful.

The first number of *Punch* appeared on July 17, 1841, and the serial has lived over fifty-six years and grown to the bulk of one hundred and thirteen volumes. It was not, however, built in a day. It knew a rickety infamy and hours of peril, and it owes its rescue from neglect and starvation, its subsequent and assured prosperity, to Messrs. Bradbury & Evans, the publishers for Dickens and Thackeray, who having bought it—some say for what its projectors had spent out of pocket—nursed and resuscitated it at the critical moment, supplying the money and the patience that made it what it has ever since remained—the national comic paper of England; comic without the sacrifice of earnestness and morality, for the jangle of its jester's bells has always had a pure tone of veneration for religion, save where, in the old days, the papacy was

concerned, while its humor has been clean and has never failed of a wholesome and weighty purpose.

Much of the credit for this belongs, of course, to the successive editors of *Punch*. Mark Lemon, first of the line, was an admirable literary director, who easily won and held the respect and good will of the brilliant corps of contributors, which, in the course of time, he drew about him. Moreover, he was a song writer and dramatist, and a clever amateur actor, playing for the Guild of Literature and Art with Dickens, Forster and the rest, and enacting the rôle of *Falstaff*—he was a man of huge physical proportions and often figured in the Christmas numbers of popular publications as Father Christmas—in an expurgated version of Shakespeare's plays of "Henry IV." It was Lemon



DOUGLAS JERROLD

[From the portrait by Sir D. Macnee, F. R. S. A., in the National Portrait Gallery.]

who, very early in the journal's history, instituted the famous weekly dinners, where the *Punch* cartoon was settled over a bottle of claret, and he wrote the "national anthem" which his contributors used to sing on these occasions, its first verse running in this wise:

"Now, boys, a row, boys, we surely may allow,  
boys,

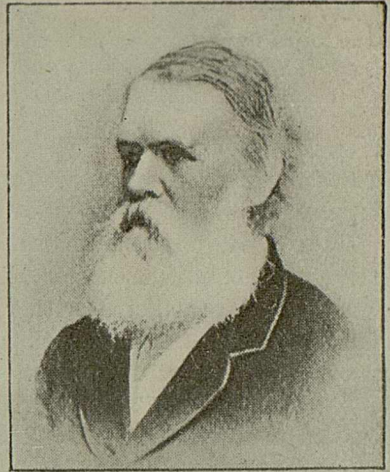
Here, boys, to cheer, boys, our hero and his lunch;  
Laughing and chaffing, the merry nectar quaffing,  
Fill, boys, we will, boys, and drink a health to  
*Punch*.





SHIRLEY BROOKS.

*(From a Photograph by Lombardi  
and Co.)*



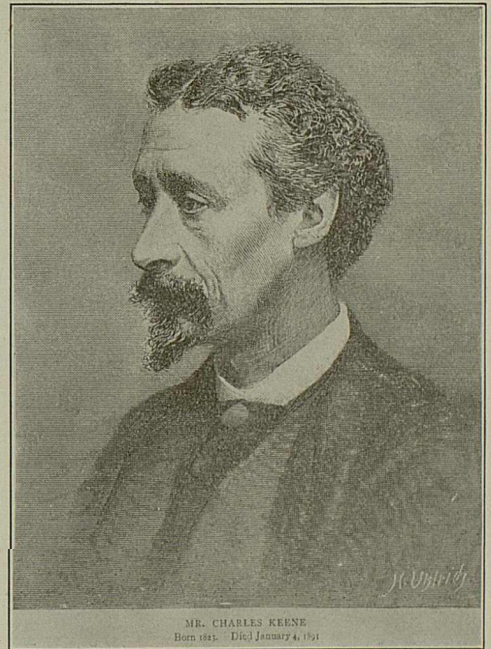
TOM TAYLOR.

*(From a Photograph by  
Bassano.)*



JOHN LEECH

[From the portrait by Sir John E. Millais, Bart., R. A.,  
in the National Portrait Gallery.]



MR. CHARLES KEENE  
Born 1841. Died January 4, 1891

CHARLES KEENE

[From the *London Graphic*.]



Long may he flourish, the same good humor nourish,

Pleasing the million, yet pandering to none ;  
Bitter but healthful, his money-box of wealth full,  
Coarse humor deeming the lowest grade of fun."

Shirley Brooks, who had for many years held the laboring oar on the *Punch* craft, succeeded to the editorship when Lemon died in 1870. He was a gracious and scholarly gentleman, the master of a light and graceful pen, and the author of a number of plays and novels popular in their day but now half-forgotten. His "Essence of Parliament" was for many years a feature of *Punch*. After Brooks came Tom Taylor, a writer of excellent verse—witness his memorable lines called forth by the death of Lincoln—the author of several successful plays, and for twenty years the art critic of the *Times*. Both Brooks and Taylor were men of mark, imbued with and respecting the creed formulated by Lemon, that fun and humor could be good fun and humor, and still be wholesome, healthy and pure, so that *Punch* was in their time, as it is to-day, a favorite in the parsonage and the drawing-room as well as the club.

Francis C. Burnand is the present editor of *Punch*. Mr. Burnand was educated at Eton and Cambridge, and duly called to the bar; but instead of occupying himself with briefs, turned his attention to farce-writing. Then he drifted into comic journalism, and in 1863 was writing for *Fun*. It occurred to him that to burlesque the sensational novel of the day was an idea that would lend itself to humorous writing and drawing. Accordingly he sought and secured an interview with Mark Lemon, to whom he suggested "Mokeanna," to be illustrated after the manner of the *London Journal*—an illustrated story paper of the period. The editor of *Punch* promptly accepted the proposal; the burlesque appeared, illustrated by Gilbert, Du Maurier and

Keene, and at once became the talk of the town.

When the first chapters were published, Mr. Bradbury, the senior proprietor of *Punch*, was ill and confined to his bed. His number of *Punch* that week reached him with the *London Journal* burlesque folded outside. At first he thought that the *Journal* had been sent to him by mistake, but when he discovered that the page formed a portion of *Punch* he did not stay to read a line, but bounding from bed, dressed with wild haste and hurried to the office. "Stop *Punch*," he exclaimed; "stop the machine. You have got a page of the *Journal* in the form!" And it required considerable explanation before the printer and proprietor really understood the thing.

In this manner did Mr. Burnand become a member of the *Punch* staff. Thackeray was the first man that he met among the *Punch* writers, and the great novelist introduced him at the weekly dinners in these words: "Gentlemen—the new boy." The newcomer worked industriously and with marked success from the first moment that he became a member of the *Punch* brotherhood; his diverting "Happy Thoughts," begun in 1866, greatly enhanced his prestige and fixed him firmly in the public eye, and when, in 1880, Tom Taylor died, he succeeded to the editorship, since which time he has discharged its duties ably and well. Mr. Burnand, who is now rising two-and-sixty, is a family man, the happy father of thirteen children, and as cheery and pleasant in his manners as he is in his writing.

I have mentioned Thackeray as a *Punch* contributor. His name, with that of Douglas Jerrold, stands at the head of an ever-growing list that, at one time and another, has included a majority of the brightest and wittiest men in England, among them, not to name men whose work





#### SAGACITY.

Countryman. "F'r POUNDS too much for him? He's a WON'ERFUL GOOD SPORTIN' DAUG, SIR! WHY HE COME TO A DEAD PINT IN THE STREET, SIR, CLOSE AG'IN A OL' GEN'LEMAN, THE OTHER DAY—'FEST O' SEPTEMBER IT WAS, SIR!—AN' THE GEN'LEMAN TOLD ME ARTERWARDS AS HIS NAME WERE 'PARTRIDGE'!"

Customer. "YOU DON'T SAY SO!"

[Bargain struck!]

CHARLES KEENE'S LAST DRAWING

is still unfinished, Tom Hood, Horace and Henry Mayhew, Gilbert A' Beckett, Albert Smith, Percival Leigh, W. H. Wills, Stirling Coyne, H. P. Grattan, C. Laman Blanchard and James Hannay. Jerrold, who was thirty-eight years old when *Punch* came into being, found his most congenial sphere of work in its columns, and was a constant contributor from the second number until ten days before his

death in 1857. His famous "Caudle Lectures," which have the permanency of all true humor, first appeared in *Punch*, but their author always made light of their instant and enduring popularity, claiming, with the usual perversity of a man of genius, to value most his more serious efforts—an opinion, it should be added, which few of his admirers shared with him. Those who knew Jerrold described him as boyish and impulsive in manner until the last, giving full play at all times to the acrid wit which often pained both friend and foe.

Thackeray's connection with *Punch*, which began in 1842 and ended in 1854, bore fruit in the "Book of Snobs" and the "Yellow Plush Papers," and in several hundred humorous drawings. He was long the most conspicuous figure at the weekly Wednesday dinners, already referred to, at which the plan for the forthcoming issue of

*Punch* is solemnly agreed upon and worked out, and to which no stranger is ever allowed admission upon any possible pretence whatever. Sir Joseph Paxton and a lady, the wife of one of the publishers, are said to be the only outsiders who have ever witnessed the sacred function. Most of Thackeray's associates on the staff, for one reason or another, held him in wholesome awe, and Lemon once con-





“MOSE IN EGITTO!!!”

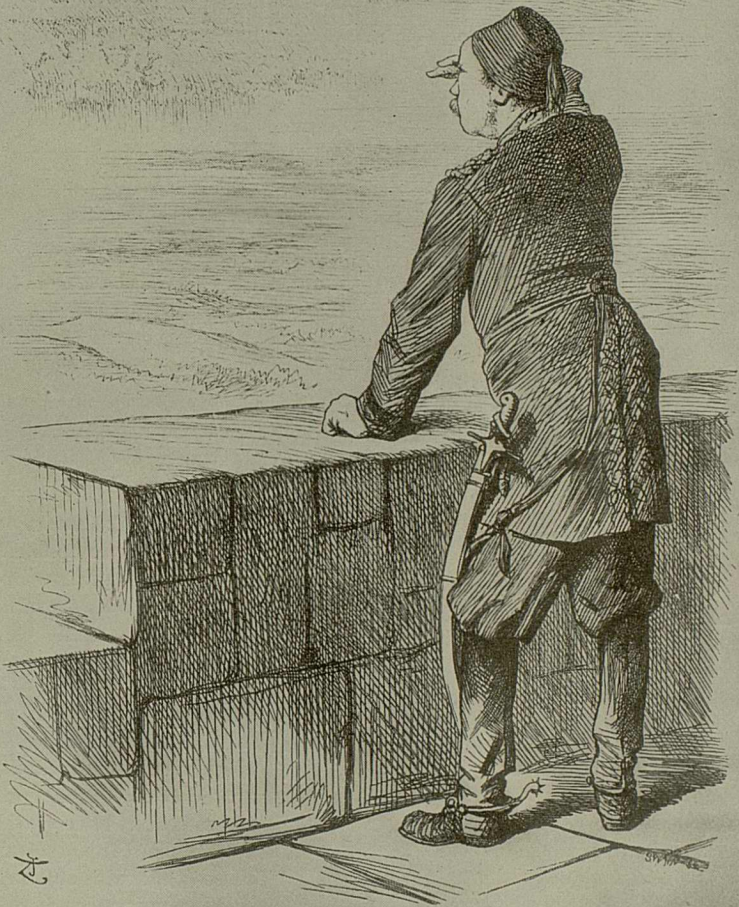
“PUNCH’S” COMPLIMENTS TO DISRAELI. DRAWING BY SIR JOHN TENNIEL

fessed to Joseph Hatton that he was never quite at home with his distinguished contributor—“Thackeray was always so infernally wise” was the jolly editor’s excuse for his own timidity.

**Horace Mayhew** was for a time co-editor with Lemon. Coyne, whose wit equaled

his industry, wrote for the first numbers only, and the clever and sarcastic Leigh was but an occasional contributor. Gilbert A’Beckett, on the other hand, who, to quote the words of Jerrold inscribed upon his tomb at Highgate, “was singularly gifted with the subtlest powers of





“MIRAGE.”

GENERAL GORDON. . . . . “WHAT IS IT THAT I SEEM TO SEE  
ACROSS THE SAND WASTE? IS IT THE QUICK GLEAM  
OF ENGLISH STEEL, OR BUT A DESERT-DREAM?  
HELP—OR, THAT LAST ILLUSION OF DISTRESS,  
THE MOCKING MIRAGE OF THE WILDERNESS?”

“PUNCH’S,” TRIBUTE TO GORDON. DRAWING BY SIR JOHN TENNIEL

humor and wit, faculties ever exercised by their possessor to the healthiest and most innocent purpose,” wrote regularly for *Punch* from its earliest numbers until his death in 1856. Tom Hood was already a dying man when *Punch* was founded, and his contributions to it were few in number, but the best thing that he ever wrote, the immortal “Song of the Shirt,” crept into the world through its columns. Nor



does this complete the list of *Punch's* contributors. Coventry Patmore was seen at least once in its pages, and Lord Tennyson twice, when under the pseudonym

of "Alcibiades" he turned upon Lord Lytton, "the padded man that wears the stays," and contemptuously pulled his pretensions to pieces.

*Rufus Rockwell Wilson.*

[*Concluded next month.*]

[NOTE.—The portraits as given in this article, of Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold, Shirley Brooks, Tom Taylor and John Leech, are taken, by permission, from Mr. M. H. Spielmann's notable "History of *Punch*," published by Messrs. Cassell & Co. Acknowledgment is hereby made to that firm for their courtesy in allowing these rare portraits to be reproduced in Mr. Wilson's article.]

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